Relationship and dialogue

Why are relationship and dialogue central to developing an operationalised model of reflective function? What role do they play in the guide-adolescent relationship?

Connection and relationship

The role of ‘relationship’ from a theoretical perspective is central to this thesis. Firstly, educators should be considering unfolding the student’s learning experience and examining the connection students have to their learning. Secondly, it is important to establish that the notions of relationship and dialogue need to be taken seriously in the education system and by schools in particular, where affect regulation is seen as a positive quality for all teachers in establishing the culture of the school and developing a secure base from which all can work positively. This chapter focuses on affect regulation through the establishment of relationships and dialogue.

The attachment theorists have already explained for us the processes that we go through as infants, which will lead us to an attachment style or trait. Attachment implies that we are connected to other persons, environments and events. In this chapter I focus on the importance of relationship and connection for us as humans, and the factors which might lead adolescents to greater connection to learning, particularly in the establishment of affect regulation.

De Quincey (2005) suggests that we are embedded in relationships, and the mark of a good life is the quality of our interconnectedness. It is the quality of the interconnectedness that I wish to emphasise in this thesis. Bowlby (1979) points out the importance of a secure base where the quality of the interconnectedness is vital to healthy development. De Quincey (2005) states it very clearly when he suggests that we all get the same package: a body, a mind and relationships. He goes further to point out that we are trained to take care of our bodies and our minds but we get little assistance with our relationships. We are, according to de Quincey (2005), connected to everything, and we need to focus on relationship as the deepest form of consciousness. We are in a relationship and then individuality comes from that relationship. This is very similar to attachment theory in that we don’t form relationships; they form us, we co-create each other. Our relationship with the world is a product of the relationship we experience with our mothers and with other significant people (Knox 2003). This is extended to all sorts of experiences as we build up our internal working models of the world. But, how do we co-create each other within the education system?
De Quincy (2005) gives an emphasis to interconnectedness in his model of evolutionary consciousness, which involves intersubjectivity, sentience, awake/awareness, personal reflection, the interpersonal, the unitive and dissociative. While most of the model has been alluded to by other theorists, his emphasis on relationship through consciousness is different and, along with other researchers, gives a basis for the search for relationship that humans seek. I will not pursue de Quincey (2005), although his discussion on Whitehead’s panpsychism and the relationship of subject-object giving rise to the next round of the subject-object spiral does give an understandable account of the mental process and its relationship to time.

This human process of bringing the unconscious into consciousness, thus providing a platform for further consideration and development, takes place in a personal yet interconnected way. It is the basis of our growth and development and, as Kegan (1994) has pointed out, something we can generate or inhibit.

**Carl Rogers on relationship in education**

Carl Rogers was the initiator of a movement in psychology, psychotherapy and education called the ‘person-centred’ or ‘client-centred’. Person-centred education aims to provide a facilitative environment which is characterised by personal warmth, genuineness and empathetic understanding. Person-centred educational methodologies are found to be as efficacious as others (Cornelius-White et al. 2010). I want to focus here on the major premises that Rogers (1983) proposed as being central to the successful education of a learner. Rogers’ focus was on the inter-relatedness of human beings. He was extremely active in writing on education as well as his major focus, counselling.

Frager and Fadiman (1998) in summarising the major concepts of Rogers (1983), suggest that there is a field of experience unique to each individual that contains all that the human is experiencing at the time which is available to awareness. Lyon and Tuasch (2014) postulated that each individual made assessment of these events and those assessments can only be known to them. He saw the self as a process, as Frager and Fadiman suggest an “organised, consistent gestalt, constantly in the process of forming and reforming as situations change” (1998: 405).

This appears to be very close to the Kelly (1955) position of internal schemas and other memory model theorists. Rogers (1983) held that if the difference between ideal self and actual self was too distant then incongruence or uncomfortable feelings of dissatisfaction might eventuate. This concept of difference between ideal self and actual self was utilised in developing a questionnaire for students.

Roger’s general view of therapy was reflected in his view of human nature. He deeply believed that in each person there is an innate ability to self-actualise, if given the freedom to do so, and hence solve
problems that they encountered. The therapist or teacher’s role was to free the client so that they could be empowered to reach their own conclusions. This was controversial for it was long held that an expert was needed to solve the client’s problem. Rogers emphasized the process of seeking knowledge:

...the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. (1983: 104)

In discussing the aim of education Rogers states:

I see the facilitation of learning as the aim of education, the way in which we develop the learning man, the way in which we can learn to live as individuals in the process. I see the facilitation of learning as the function which may hold constructive, tentative, changing, process answers to some of the deepest perplexities which beset man today. (1983: 105)

Teachers then, were to be facilitators who led learners to know the process by which they could develop knowledge and solutions. Rogers’ describes teachers in this way.

We know... that the initiation of such learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon his scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audiovisual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilizes, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, although each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. (1983: 105-6)

Rogers is definite about the role of the teacher and he stresses the importance of his basic three rules for therapists or teachers, which are the requirements for a successful engagement between teacher and student, or practitioner and client. These attributes of the teacher outlined by Rogers form the basis of the affect regulation in the one-to-one relationship of the teacher and the student.

Rogers states that perhaps the most basic of these essential attitudes is realness or genuineness. The facilitator (teacher) must be a real person, transparent with the learner, aware of the way he/she experiences the relationship and his/her attitude to the client. This does not mean that the teacher has to be a perfect human being. But the teacher has to be seen to own their emotional states in the interaction with the learners on a person-to-person basis. Zimring (1994) also suggests that the teacher can be...
real person in his relationship with his students. He can show his emotions and empathy. Because these feelings are his own, he has no need to impose them on his students. He is a person to his students, not a faceless embodiment of the education system, its curriculum or merely the transmitter of knowledge from one generation to another.

The second requirement identified by Rogers is that the relationship between therapist and client, or teacher and student, is one of unconditional positive regard. The teacher must accept and trust the learner as being capable of solving their own problems. The imperfect learner must be prized as a person capable of many potentials, feelings and emotional states. As has been indicated, adolescence is a time when learners go through a range of emotional states and challenges. It should be the innate belief held by the teacher that there is an instinctive drive in the learner to self-actualise.

Unconditional positive regard involves caring for the learner, but a non-possessive caring and an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, having worth in his/her own right. Unconditional positive regard is a basic trust, a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy. In listing the preconditions for dialogue Schmid states:

\textit{Acknowledgment is more than the absence of judgments. It is an active and pro-active way of deliberately saying yes to the Other as a person. It means the person as such is ‘appreciated’ in his or her worth and dignity — ‘ap-preciat-ed’ means to be esteemed as a ‘precious’ being. It aims towards a mutual acknowledgment as persons instead of knowledge about another. (2002: 64)}

As to the third attitudinal quality and requirement, Rogers observes that empathetic understanding is central to the learner being able to realise that someone understands them without judging or analysing. This requires the teacher to stand in the shoes of the learner and perceive how it might be from their side. The teacher does not have to understand the problem of the student nor guide the student to solving the problem, it is enough for the teacher to be genuine, unconditionally accepting and empathetically directed to the relationship with the learner.

Rogers’ work is central to the establishment of person-centred education. Cornelius-White (2007), in conducting a meta-analysis of person- centred education, found it to be more than efficacious in comparison to other methodologies in education. In concluding an article, Cornelius-White stated:

\textit{There is strong emphasis of the effectiveness of the PCE (Person-Centred Education) paradigm in education for a range of affective, behavioural and intellectual outcomes,}
especially for the core variables of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and non-directivity. (2010: 53)

Person-centred education, and the contribution of Rogers in establishing this movement in education, has been established by exhaustive research, as being effective in education. In his critique of Rogers’ work Zimring (1994) concluded that:

*These self-actualizing processes are freed when a teacher has particular attitudes. That is, these processes are freed, and self-initiated learning occurs, when the congruent teacher unconditionally prizes and responds empathetically to the world of, to the interests and enthusiasms of, the student. The history of the programs where these teacher attitudes have been attempted indicates that it is difficult for teachers and administrators to change their attitudes, to share their power and responsibility and to trust the intrinsic motivation of their students to learn. The history of these programs also indicates that, where teachers and administrators change their attitudes, the student’s motivation, learnings and behaviour is improved.* (1994: 418)

Rogers’ description of ‘conditions of worth’, as outlined in Frager and Fadiman (1998), is very similar to that of attachment theory in that the child seeking ‘maternal love’ is demonstrating a universal need. The parent needs to be able to distinguish between the behaviour and the seeking of the affection. Love is so important to the infant that he or she comes to be guided in behaviour by the likelihood of receiving maternal love.

Rogers believed that relationships enabled an individual to discover self, and that through relationships with others our personalities became visible. It is here, in relationship, that Rogers sees humans becoming fulfilled and self-actualising, and it is this desire for fulfilment that drives us to spend many hours pursuing relationships whether they be healthy or not.

Neville (2011) found that one of the great attractions of Carl Rogers’ thinking is his deep belief in the ordinariness of the person-centred approach. The central tenets of his theory, Rogers later recognized, are at the heart of all creative relationships, and at the heart of the good life. For Rogers, recognition of the new way of seeing relationships became a ‘way of being’.

Throughout the thesis I have used the work of psychotherapists and developmental theorists and applied it to the work of the guides working with adolescent learners. It is worth pointing out that Rogers saw the client-centred approach as political and applying to more than the professions. As Schmid points out:
Rogers's understanding of politics was oriented towards power and control. Accordingly "the politics of the PCA" (person-centered approach) to him was "a conscious renunciation and avoidance by the therapist of all control over, or decision-making for, the client." The focus is on the facilitation of self-ownership, on the client’s self-responsibility, and on the strategies to achieve this goal. The locus of decision-making is "politically centered in the client" (1977, p. 14). Rogers went on to reflect upon the threat for the therapist of losing power in the traditional sense of the word, when the power stays with the client. He critically deals with other approaches, including the humanistic, demonstrating their inconsistency when they regard the therapist as an expert on the one hand and stress the self-responsibility of the client on the other hand – a critique currently relevant more than ever.

But there is much more: Rogers understood the theoretical foundations, even the image of the human being itself, as political (1977, pp. 237–251). In talking about an organismic foundation of the actualizing tendency, he regarded the nature of the human being itself as political. For Rogers, the alienation of human beings from their constructive actualizing tendency, from their nature, is the source of suffering. (2012:97)

Schmid (2012) indicates that Rogers thought of the client-centred approach as a quiet revolution that included sensitive people as well as those not in the professions. It is anti-hierarchical, particularly when seen in contrast with the medical model of fixing the client. Likewise, it is worth emphasising that the processes I am advocating are available for all sensitive people interested in forming effective person-centred relationships.
Adolescence and belonging

Like Karen Osterman (2000) I share the concern about how schools, as social organisations, address ‘belongingness’, a basic psychological need. Her findings suggest that students’ experience of acceptance and belongingness influences multiple dimensions of their behaviour, but that schools adopt organisational practices that neglect and may actually undermine student experience of membership in a supportive community.

The Glasser Institute aims to utilise choice theory, the theory developed by Glasser (1999), to teach all students. This theory argues that all we do is behave and that we choose our behaviour to satisfying five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. The most important of these is the need to love and belong. The Glasser Institute has founded a movement, ‘The Glasser Quality School Movement’, to continue the work of its founder. The movement emphasises internal control over behaviour through the adoption of the seven habits: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences in schools. Schools agree to undergo training and adopt these seven habits to become a ‘Quality School’ as well as adopting expectation of high standards of academic achievement. I introduce the notions of Glasser because they reinforce the person-centred approach of internal or personal control of one’s choices, and emphasise that relationships are at the core of behaviour.

As an ex-principal within the Victorian system, I have witnessed first-hand the difficulties that a focus on economic rationalism has caused to teachers, and the ability of those teachers to deal individually with students as they progress through our large suburban high schools. It is within this professional context that I investigate whether or not ‘belonging’ and theory of mind (reflective function or metacognition) may be relevant to the teaching-learning process. Certainly Glasser (1999) endorses the view that belonging matters in our schools.

As Hamburg and Takanishi (1984) suggest, adolescence is the time when individuals adopt self-damaging behaviour patterns which can harm their future prospects. These patterns are established because a sense of love and belonging are not established in relationships along with a sense of success and achievement (Seligman 2012) and so the self-damaging behaviour becomes established (Glasser Institute 2013). As argued above, the centrality of relationship has been established by De Quincy, Rogers, and Riley (2011). I agree with Behr and Cornelius-White that “an array of empirical research supports the person-centred rationale fostering all aspects of growth within the helping relationship with young people” (2008: 10).

Early adolescence is a time of particular vulnerability (Fuller 2006), even for those whose childhoods were not deprived. Young adolescents experience biological, social, neurological, cognitive, and
psychological changes that lead them to reappraise themselves and their relationships to their families and communities. These changes are often accompanied by disengagement from school, the onset of experimentation with alcohol and other drugs, and sexual activity (Jackson & Hornbeck 1984; Millstein 1984). Research shows that problem behaviours manifested early tend to persist into later life (Knox 2003). It makes sense, therefore, to orient interventions toward the early years of adolescence before self-destructive habits are established.

Building on this theory, this thesis establishes a new model for teachers and learners based on theory and sound educational practice to assist adolescents to apply the best possible approach to their own education.

**The nature of relationship**

We need to belong because relationship is at the very foundation of human development. As a species we need to develop a ‘theory of mind’ perspective which allows each individual to see that all other individuals exist and have mental capacity, desires, needs and ambitions that are distinctive from self.

Attachment theory (Bowlby 1979; Fonagy 1997; Knox 2003) has established that relationship is at the centre of human development of meaning. The set goal of attachment is ‘felt security’ (Riley 2011: 122). Rogers (1983) and De Quincy (2005) have extended this view of the centrality of relationship, and Levinas and Schmid (as cited in Neville 2011) have emphasised the importance of dialogue within relationship. Knox states:

> One of the most important developments in the last 20 years has been the convergence of research findings from across a spectrum of related disciplines, including developmental psychology, neurobiology and attachment theories, showing that the cognitive and emotional development of the human mind is not solipsistic but crucially depends on interpersonal relationships from the earliest weeks of life onwards and even in utero. (2003: 168)

Knox (2003) is suggesting that research is guiding us to look for the development of the cognitive and emotional aspects of ourselves through interrelationships and dialogue.

Further, in this thesis I suggest that, in the field of education, we are no different and that the primary focus of educators needs to be on the relationship between learner and the learning institution, and the relationships with teachers and peers that the learner experiences.
For Knox, it is through the development of internal working models, maps or schemas “that we appraise the meaning of situations, not on the basis of formal rules of logic but instead on the basis of activation and manipulation of the particular mental model in operation” (Knox 2003: 168). George Kelly (1955) came to a similar conclusion that we develop internal working models that we test with each new experience.

Further, Bowlby argues that “these internal working models influence a person’s perception of and attitudes and behaviour towards, all subsequent emotionally important relationships...” (1988 in Knox 2003: 80). It is the relationship which enables the development of meaning from our earliest moments on the planet. These relationships establish patterns which will exist into adulthood. It is essential, if we are to realise the potential of each individual, that learners be given the opportunity to appraise these relationships, events and experiences that shape the attitudes to learning.

De Quincey states:

There are all kinds of relationships besides love and marriage. Relationships with our family of origin. Relationships at work and in our careers. Relationships with our neighbours and community. Relationships with our pets, and with other animals and plants we rely on for companionship and nourishment. Relationships with bacteria and other microbes that influence our health and vitality. Relationship with our homes, and cars, and boats and all our worldly possessions. Relationships with our environment. Relationships with our church or synagogue or mosque temple or stupa. Relationship with a God or gods whatever we conceive him, her or them to be.

You get the picture. Relationships are pervasive. (2005: 7)

We are all interconnected. The question, then, is: what is the quality of our connections?

The centrality of dialogue and intersubjectivity

As this thesis, and the change in practice described therein, is intended for teachers, the focus is on the role of teacher in establishing and maintaining relationships with students to better enable learning.

Central to the relationship between two individuals is the intersubjectivity of the relationship. Schmid (2006), for example, sees dialogue as central, where dialogue is understood to be the primary aspect of being human. Schmid states that dialogue “…is a primary fact in the human condition, an original occurrence. It follows: the human person is dialogue. This is more than a nicely put statement, because
it places our understanding of our being in the world and with each other on new ground: being in the world is being in dialogue” (2006: 247).

This is similar to the de Quincy (2005) discussion on relationship, described earlier in this chapter. We are born in relationship and born into dialogue.

While I am investigating transformation for adolescent learners, it is movement to another, better understanding of themselves as learners that is being sought, and dialogue is central to achieving that end. It is through dialogue that the unconscious can be made conscious and notions effecting learning performance can be examined. Schmid states that “true dialogue is not transmission of information; it is participation in the being of the other which is only possible if it includes meta-communication ... i.e. mutual reflection of the communication” (2006: 246). This is the central tenet of the enhanced model for one-to-one relationships espoused in this thesis.

Dialogue with adolescent students is vital if we are to seek transformation. It is the quality of the dialogue which is the measure of the quality of the relationship. Schmid (2006) argues that we only exist through our relationship with others; that being a person essentially means being-for-the-other. Hence the role of the guide is to bring the narrative of the learner to conscious exploration, while developing an intentional stance to educational experience, appraising the educational experience and taking others into consideration when making decisions.

Being in the world inevitably means being in dialogue and the true dialogue, which is basic to our nature, is dialogue which is in the service of the other. Rogers and Buba held a dialogue on dialogue in 1957 (cited in Cisnna & Anderson 1994) and while there were differences in opinion they established that dialogue is essential to our nature, and that unless we can occasionally engage in real dialogue, where our realness meets the realness of another, we are not living as human beings. It is the centrality of the dialogue within the relationship that is important to this thesis as it argues that every adolescent learner should have such a relationship and dialogue with a teacher who can act as the accompanying guide throughout the schooling process. If the only positive to come from the relationship is the prompting of the self-actualising tendency (Rogers, 1985; Rogers et al. 2013) then some success is achievable.

Rogers provides a basis for the processes to succeed in schools when the learners come into relationship with teachers who, being congruent real people, give unconditional positive regard and empathy to the student. Cornelius-White (2007) found in meta-analysis of person-centred research that the person-centred processes outlined by Rogers for use in schools initially are effective. It is clear from a Rogerian perspective that relationship and dialogue are central to the existence of every human. It is the quality
and extent of the dialogue that is central to the success of the learner, and yet we have inadequate systems our schools to provide for that on-going dialogue. Perhaps the summary of the psychotherapeutic relationship by Mearns and Schmid also remains a challenge for our schools:

Rather than allowing our practice to become ever more relationally detached and reliant on observations, analyses and techniques, might we take up the challenge and explore how we could more fully harness the power of human relationship while simultaneously laying down the ethics for its professionalism? (2006: 256)

A focus of this thesis is the development of such a quality dialogue and the development and viability of a questionnaire (as described in Chapter Six) to facilitate such a dialogue, which is central to the development of the learner.

Relationships are intersubjective, that is, relationships between people are experienced phenomenologically. Each person will interpret the interactions with others personally and differently from the other. This focus on the intersubjectivity of the relationship, rather than the experiences of two interacting individuals, has been taken up by Schmid (2006) and Mearns and Schmid (2006) in their discussions of ‘relational depth’. Central to this discussion is the notion of dialogue. Schmid (2006) argues that dialogue is the realization and acknowledgement of the underlying interaction between humans. Although two people may be in a dialogue, each will perceive the dialogue phenomenologically. Each individual, based on their own internal schemas, will make of the dialogue what they will and it will be different for each other, even if they appear to be in total agreement.

Dialogue is understood to be a primary and irreducible aspect of being human (Rogers 1951, 1983, 2013; Schmid 2002, 2006, 2012). If relationship and dialogue, as concepts, are so central to an understanding of the human condition, where is its emphasis within education in the current debates, and teacher training? It may be functioning as an underlying central construct at many schools but is at the unconscious level, and not at the forefront of discussion within the education community within the OECD (2008), where the emphasis is still on structural (distal) reform (Cranston et al. 2009; see Chapter Two for further discussion)

Intersubjectivity, whether spoken, unspoken, conscious or unconscious is an ever-present element in the dialogue. The dialogue is still perceived phenomenologically by each of the participants and so it would be wrong to conclude that all that comprises an intersubjective dialogue is shared mutually. While the dialogue may enable another to feel engaged with, as part of a greater connection through relationship, each will have their own perceptions and interpretations of the dialogue.
What is the notion of a ‘dialogue’ that would describe the preferred interaction between a guide and the learner? The dialogue currently experienced by the adolescent learner is held with subject teachers, and in most cases this may be as many as nine teachers a week, all of whom may have 140-160 students per week.

The notion of a personal dialogue with a teacher able to facilitate a personal narrative around learning would be the case for only those students who are gifted or are extremely troublesome, and in many cases these ‘discussions’ are confrontational and do not meet the facilitative conditions outlined by Rogers (1969). In general, the vast majority of students are dealt with in large groups and individual students do not come into school or teacher focus. As the evaluators reported in research on the middle and post-compulsory years (Ocean and Cauley 1999, Ocean 2000 and Henry et al 2002), many teachers found it difficult to establish and maintain a one-to-one relationship with a student. Secondary teachers are trained to process, using groups and group techniques, and some find establishing one-to-one relationships difficult (Riley, 2011). Fuller (2006) and Hamburg and Takanishi (1984) suggest that the adolescent is vulnerable and is searching for meaning in their learning, and yet in my observations across my professional life most secondary schools process students on a group basis with little or no time given to individual students.

If students were able to develop a one-to-one connection with a guide, would the concerns raised by Osterman (2000) around belonging be answered? I suggest that if students were able to develop their own personal narrative around their experiences in learning they might be better able to see their role and their future a little clearer. Further, if students were able to see their relationship with learning as a fundamental narrative of life where they can set goals and appraise their progress in a relationship with a teacher, their approach to ‘subjects’, the mainstream curriculum, could be improved.

It would appear from the research, that provision of a one-to-one relationship with a guide, in a dialogue around learning, might enable the conscious development of reflective function and mentalisation of the learner’s stance toward their education. Bringing the latent into conscious presence through mentalisation would enable epistemological transformation and enhance student performance. Transformation is not something that one does to another. It is a process that occurs when the seed is planted and it grows. Transformation needs to be facilitated, best done by a guide on the side, meeting the conditions to be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter Eight), as outlined by Rogers (1969) and Knox (2013).
Neville and Dalmau suggest that the proper stance for the change agent in an organisation is:

...to facilitate dialogue between the shared consciousness of the organization and the organization’s unconscious. The organizational consultant guides the journey through the organization’s dreams, fantasies, symbols, stories and rituals and ‘meaningful situations so that the energy of the unconscious can flow into the organization’s awareness and conscious behaviour. In this scenario, capacities and potentials that have been suppressed can be discovered and embraced, and artefacts, perspectives, values and assumptions can be transformed. (2008: 77)

If this is transposed into the role of the guide as change agent working with a learner then the realisation of capacities and potentials might be embraced by the adolescent learner.